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AUTHOR Burden, Charles A.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This report stems from an international study program in which Georgia State University (Atlanta) management students traveled to the People's Republic of China to examine that country's economic system and management practices. The study is designed for academics who are considering taking students to China, those who are traveling by themselves to China, and for business people who are hoping to gain a greater understanding of China. A 34-statement opinionnaire was devised and administered to the students before and after the visit to China. An analysis and comparison of the before and after responses revealed that although students indicated that they had learned much from their visit, their opinions on the administered questions had not shifted measurably. Appendices containing the opinionnaire as well as an analysis of the students' responses are included. (DB)

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AN ON-SITE STUDY OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Charles A. Burden, Georgia State University
Karla W. Stein, Georgia State University
Benjamin H. Layne, Georgia State University
Michael J. Jedel, Georgia State University

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The purpose of this brief but intense international study program was for a group of Georgia State University management students to examine China's economic system and management practices. For every student (and for the two faculty members) it was a first visit to the People's Republic of China.

Useful for Businesses and Academic Reasons

Here is a practical study for academics who are considering taking students to this fascinating country as well as for those who are travelling by themselves to China. In addition, it will be of interest to business persons who are hoping to gain a greater understanding of China. A careful examination of the 34-statement opinionnaire, as well as the business student responses to the opinionnaire, should provide numerous insights into China through American eyes.

Obviously there was an enormous learning experience during the 17-day study program. Each student and faculty member confirmed this observation through verbal interviews at the program's end. The researchers, however, had earlier decided to attempt to measure opinion shifts of students during the China experience.

A 34-statement opinionnaire was devised and administered to the students during their first class meeting in the U.S. (before several once-a-week lectures and discussions on China were presented). This was after student participants had known for several months that they would be travelling to China on the program, but before several once-a-week lectures and discussions on China. After the visit to China, the same 34-statement opinionnaire was administered to the program participants so that before and after responses could be compared. In order to determine whether there were significant differences between the pretest and posttest responses, a correlated samples t-test was performed on each of the 34 opinionnaire items.

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LEARNING ABOUT THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA ON-SITE!

The Economy as Seen Through American Eyes

The People's Republic of China has long been unavailable for Western scrutiny. Scholars, the press, and the general public of the United States have exhibited an enormous interest in the PRC's economic, social, and governmental systems. Reasons for the interest are obvious. A country of over a billion people, China is potentially a huge producer and consumer of goods. Its culture and history are fascinating. For a decade in the 1960s and 1970s, China underwent an alarming "cultural revolution."

Since the early 1980s, the PRC has been slowly opening to the West. Comparatively speaking, "the lid is off China," declares Ross Terrill (1985) in The National Geographic. Not entirely, however. Business Week pessimistically ran a 1987 article on China entitled "Economic Reforms May Have Begun a Long March Backwards," predicting economic reform slippages on a powerful political struggle between a "conservative backlash" against "bourgeois liberalization." Still later last year, Business Week declared "Deng's Reforms Will Prevail--But At A Price." It was precisely in the middle of this unsettled 1987 environment that the Georgia State University Department of Management, under the sponsorship of the International Intercultural Studies Program of the University System of Georgia, conducted a study program for business students to the People's Republic of China. The purpose of the intense, brief foreign study program was to examine China's economic system and

management practices. For every student (and for the two faculty members) it was the first visit to the People's Republic of China.

USEFUL FOR BUSINESS AND ACADEMIC REASONS

The international program is a practical study both for academics considering taking students to this fascinating country, and to businesspersons hoping to gain a greater understanding of China. A careful examination of the 34-statement opinionnaire utilized in this study program (See Appendix 1), and the business student responses to it should provide numerous insights into China through American eyes.

It is apparent there was an enormous learning experience during the 17-day international program. Each student and faculty member confirmed this observation through verbal interviews at the program's end. The researchers, however, earlier had decided to attempt to measure opinion shifts of students before and after the China experience.

A 34-statement opinionnaire was devised and administered to the first class meeting of students in the U.S. --before several once-a-week lectures and discussions on China-- but after student participants had known for several months that they would be traveling to China. The same 34-statement opinionnaire was administered at the end of the program, after the visit to China, and the before-after responses were compared. In order to determine whether there were significant changes between the

pretest and posttest responses, a correlated samples t-test was performed on each of the 34 opinionnaire items. The analyses resulted in a significant difference ($p < .05$) between before and after responses in the items to be discussed below.

TEST INSTRUMENT AND THE PARTICIPANTS

Before discussion of the results, however, the measuring instrument and the student participants are briefly described. The 34-statement opinionnaire used a nine-point Likert-type scale with one being "strongly disagree" and nine being "strongly agree." The opinionnaire is an expansion of an earlier, more limited, 13-statement before-after opinionnaire used by the researchers on a international study program for students to West Germany and Great Britain (Layne 1986).

The group of student participants was typical of a large, urban university's student population. Students included both men and women (more women than men), graduate and undergraduate students, with an age range of 23-54. All students previously had taken previous business courses, and most students held full-time business or government jobs in addition to attending the university. The study is based on 12 responses from the student participants. Some interesting student responses and some speculative researchers' interpretations follow.

The first intriguing discovery was how few collective opinions of China shifted significantly after the China visit. Only four of the 34 questions could be identified as portraying

significant collective shifts. Perhaps even more fascinating were which four of the 34 questions resulted in shifts in opinion. Also, there were some interesting responses where the students agreed or disagreed with the statements, but did not shift their collective opinion after the visit. Lastly, there were some responses where students scored counter (both before and after) to expectations of the researchers (expectations generally based on popular media reports). See Appendix 2 for scoring of each item.

Finally, there should be a caveat about the opinionnaire. Statements selected for the opinionnaire reflect the bias of the researchers by the very act of using them. Questions were phrased in such a way as to be brief and direct rather than subtle, academic postulations. As the opinionnaire was rather lengthy and was administered in the first minutes of the first class meeting, the researchers felt academic subtleties might have been, well, too academic.

THE RESULTS

The first statement with a significant statistical shift was Question 4: "The PRC as a developing society has achieved an increase in national income." The pretest mean was 5.92 (slightly agree) with the posttest score rising to a strongly agree 7.83. While the question was purposefully general, the researchers believe that the students (rightfully) associated an increase in national income with some increase in individual well-being. The

authors' interpretation of the responses was that in the pretest, the students expected to find either a stagnant or slightly rising income ("developing society" not necessarily meaning real development but instead being used as a synonym for Third World country in common usage). Instead of mild stagnation, they seemed to find more prosperity than they had anticipated. Comments during the program included "not finding any abject poverty" to surprise at finding the general public dress to be "colorful, comfortable if inexpensive" clothing. The uniform Mao clothing and jackets were rarely spotted. Counter to this student sense of individual well-being were reservations about housing in "very small spaces, overfilled with families" and health treatment (dental concerns were particularly mentioned).

The second statement prompting a significant statistical shift was Question 5, "De-collectivation in the agricultural sector has allowed the farmers to increase productivity in the rural industries." Students expected this to be the case generally (6.33 pretest), but increased their responses to a very strong 8.00 posttest. The widespread use of basic farm equipment, and the continual noting of farmers' prosperity by a wide cross-section of Chinese speaking with this study group seemed to powerfully influence the group. Reinforcing the opinion was the fact that some of the Chinese speakers almost seemed to be registering a complaint against the farmers, suggesting farms were becoming prosperous much faster than industry. The following comments (for Statement 6) substantiate this position.

Statement 6 states: "The priorities of the Chinese economy place agriculture ahead of heavy industry." The student pretest mean was a very slight "disagree" (4.75), but the mean moved up to a moderately "agree" (6.25) position after the visit to China. Student comments reflected some Chinese concerns about "the growing strength and influence of farmers ." One student, after a lengthy discussion with a Chinese speaker, noted that old concerns about feudalism had not completely disappeared, and that industry and technology might suffer if farmers become too strong an influence in governmental affairs.

Several students had interests in the potential for import/export with the People's Republic of China. The collective reflection of the group pretest was moderately strong agreement (an average of 7.00) with Question 16: "Joint ventures are the primary means of market entry into the People's Republic of China." Posttest results showed a significant statistical increase in the agreement with that statement, to a powerful average of 8.25 out of a maximum 9.00. Students felt that China was more or less closed to U.S. exports unless a joint venture was possible. China's speakers indicated to the group a great concern about China's deficit balance of trade. This 8.25 out of posttest score represented the highest "agree" score by students of the 34 statements indicating a firm belief in the difficulty of entering Chinese markets short of joint venture.

The only statement with a statistically significant shift downward (disagree position) was statement 29: "Chinese culture

emphasizes individual worth." Even though this question was another which was subject to considerable interpretation, students nevertheless reacted strongly. Starting in a "disagree with the statement" pretest average of 3.67, the students collectively shifted to even greater disagreement to a low 1.67 mean after their China visit. For Americans, the Chinese collectivism apparently seemed particularly strong. Comments ranged from a "population SO LARGE no individual can expect much" to "cooperation and deference are stifling." Based on the posttest position, students were clearly taken aback with a culture vastly different than our own as well as with its emphasis on individuals.

In addition to student responses where a significant statistical shift occurred, several statements provided interesting student responses and led to much student discussion during the trip. Two of these statements will be addressed although there were no significant pretest and posttest shifts.

Statement 3 stated, "The Cultural Revolution was an era in which intellectual freedom was virtually non-existent." This short period from about 1967-1977 was apparently fully understood before the students entered the course, and the students firmly agreed with the statement. Chinese lecturers reinforced student opinion, as reflected with the posttest answer (See Appendix 2). Noteworthy about this statement was (1) the students' clear understanding of this period, even though American students presumably are not well versed in foreign affairs (particularly

Communist states), and (2) the Chinese willingness to acknowledge the problems of this time in their history.

The other noteworthy statement widely discussed during the visit in China was Statement 34, "PRC citizens are greatly influenced negatively in their everyday lives by the central government." Students mildly disagreed before departure (an average of 4.16: a surprise response to the researchers). The students discussed the impact of the government on citizens' everyday lives at length during the trip, and then even more strongly disagreed (an average of 3.41, but not a significant drop statistically). The researchers were greatly surprised at this posttest average. Student responses ranged from "the individual's life goes on, far removed from central government" to "sometimes I think the masses, while not intentionally acting collectively, drive the nation and leave the government out of control, even though government rule seems very strong." Another similar comment was, "I don't think anybody's in control of this giant population." While there is merit in student comments, the researchers remain intrigued by the overall response. Compulsory unionism in the central union, lack of job mobility, absence of opportunity, etc., seem to be direct influences of central government policy on day-to-day life. Such differences between students and researchers, however, reinforce the thought that as much as researchers "know" and can accurately predict student responses, learning and perceptions are never "givens" for students or faculty.

A FINAL NOTE

How is it that students, all of whom acknowledged that the international program was a powerful learning experience, shifted significantly as a group on so few of the 34 statements? All of the for-credit participants (and the faculty) graded the overall program A or B, yet collective opinions apparently changed little from the beginning of the study abroad until the end. The researchers speculate that because the students knew several months in advance of the trip, and because all of the students were very excited about the rare opportunity to visit China, they engaged in a lot of self-education in preparation. Oral quizzing seemed to confirm this conjecture, but unfortunately the researchers did not make a formal testing provision to try to substantiate pre-course preparation.

If this conjecture is correct, the researchers should not be disturbed that there were few significant shifts of student opinion. Learning still took place, albeit as self-teaching before the formal course start-up. Most students probably would not have undertaken such a massive self-education about China without the promise of an actual visit. The value of the foreign component of the program remains unchallenged. In the researchers' opinion, the "abstract" preparation and learning were triggered by and reinforced by the actual visit. Oral debriefings at the program's end seemed to verify this. So, the international study program brought about significant learning, although not quite in the framework that the researchers had

anticipated. A visit to the People's Republic of China is strongly recommended for anyone who can arrange it, whether for business exploration, education, or cultural understanding.

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APPENDIX 1

OPINIONNAIRE
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA
(An answer sheet is provided.)

1. The PRC lags 1-2 decades behind the U.S. in the development of advanced science and technology.

2. PRC's economy evidences high growth rates in industry.

3. The "Cultural Revolution" was an era in which intellectual freedom was virtually nonexistent.

4. The PRC as a developing society has achieved an increase in national income.

5. De-collectivation in the agricultural sector has allowed the farmers to increase productivity in the rural industries.

6. The priorities of the Chinese economy place agriculture ahead of heavy industry.

7. The "open door policy" is blamed for increases in social problems.

8. The increased productivity and output in grain has generated a surplus.

9. The areas where the Chinese allow importing are the basic and high-tech industries.

10. The largest deterrent to marketing in China is that there are not enough customers with enough money.

11. The Chinese transportation system for moving goods throughout the country is quite limited.

12. Textiles and apparel make up more than half of the manufactured goods exported from China to the United States.

13. Native firms operate very inefficiently under the Chinese centrally-planned economic system.

14. In the Special Economic Zones, managers have the freedom to contract with individual workers according to a floating wage scale.

15. The Chinese government promises minimal interference in the daily operation of firms in the Special Economic Zones.

16. Joint ventures are the primary means of market entry into the People's Republic of China.

17. The "American-made" image is one of the most successful means of promoting products in China.

18. The greatest obstacle American businesses encounter upon visiting China is the difference in culture.

19. Women in the PRC have a good opportunity to enter and advance in the management and professional ranks compared to the U.S.

20. PRC managers are more interested in the long run (greater than five years) than in the U.S.

21. The frequency of strikes is greater in the PRC than in the U.S.

22. Compared with the U.S., the Industrial Relations system in the PRC is highly decentralized.

23. More so than in the U.S., there is strong evidence of group or team decision making in the PRC.

24. Within the industrial relations system in China, the union structure is really a tool of the Communist party more than it is a tool for workers to represent themselves to employers.

25. Decentralization of decision making to the lower organization ranks of management and workers is more common in the PRC than in the U.S.

26. There are a large number of unofficial strikes (not sanctioned by the union) in the PRC.

27. The loosening of strong central political authority should now greatly enhance the further economic emergence of the PRC.

28. All Chinese workers are union members.

29. Chinese culture emphasizes individual worth.

30. A major goal of the current modernization movement is to rapidly increase the national income and the per capita income.

31. The PRC must engage in large scale imports of capital goods and technology in order to accelerate economic growth.

32. Textiles have traditionally been a major earner of foreign exchange.

33. A strong central government has been necessary to set the PRC on the road to industrialization and high productivity, and to maintain social order.

34. PRC citizens are greatly influenced negatively in their everyday lives by the central government.

APPENDIX 1
(Continued)

Identification: _____

Circle the appropriate response: MALE FEMALE

OPINIONAIRE

Directions: Please respond to each statement.

	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly Agree 9
1.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
3.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
4.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
5.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
6.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
7.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
8.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
9.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
11.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
12.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
13.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
14.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
15.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
16.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
17.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
18.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
19.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
20.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
21.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
22.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
23.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
24.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

APPENDIX 1
(Continued)

Identification: _____

Circle the appropriate response: MALE FEMALE

OPINIONAIRE

Directions: Please respond to each statement.

	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly Agree 9
25.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
26.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
27.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
28.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
29.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
30.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
31.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
32.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
33.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
34.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

APPENDIX 2

OPINIONNAIRE RESPONSES:

MEAN SCORES FOR 34 STATEMENTS

Question (Variable)	Students' Means
Pre1	5.2500
Post1	6.2500
Pre2	5.9167
Post2	6.3333
Pre3	7.1567
Post3	8.0000
Pre4	5.9167
Post4	7.8333
Pre5	5.3333
Post5	8.0000
Pre6	4.7500
Post6	6.2500
Pre7	6.1657
Post7	5.7500
Pre8	4.4157
Post8	5.8333
Pre9	5.5833
Post9	7.0000
Pre10	5.9167
Post10	5.4167
Pre11	6.5000
Post11	7.5000
Pre12	6.8333
Post12	6.9187
Pre13	5.2500
Post13	6.4167
Pre14	4.9167
Post14	5.5833
Pre15	6.0000
Post15	7.4167

Question (Variable)	Students' Means
Pre16	7.0000
Post16	8.2500
Pre17	5.8333
Post17	4.3333
Pre18	7.1667
Post18	7.4167
Pre19	4.0833
Post19	3.5000
Pre20	6.7500
Post20	7.2500
Pre21	1.8333
Post21	1.4167
Pre22	4.1667
Post22	2.5833
Pre23	5.7500
Post23	5.4167
Pre24	5.6364
Post24	6.8182
Pre25	5.0909
Post25	3.0909
Pre26	3.5000
Post26	2.3333
Pre27	7.3333
Post27	7.4167
Pre28	4.5833
Post28	4.3333
Pre29	3.6667
Post29	1.6667
Pre30	6.5000
Post30	6.0833
Pre31	6.8333
Post31	7.7500

Question (Variable)	Students' Means
Pre32	7.8333
Post32	7.6667
Pre33	6.7500
Post33	5.5833
Pre34	4.1667
Post34	3.4167